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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES RETURN TO POLITICS WITH
FORMER PM CHAVALIT

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador October 13 met with Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a former Prime Minister who October 1 joined the opposition Puea Thai party. Chavalit claimed that he had been saddened by the political troubles of the past few years, and had re-entered politics in order to bring about reconciliation in Thai society. In addition, Chavalit said he planned to focus on bringing peace to the South, improving relations with Thailand's neighbors, and bringing real democracy to Thailand. Chavalit told the Ambassador that the 1997 Constitution was a better model from which to approach Constitutional reform.

¶2. (C) Comment: Chavalit and the other Puea Thai representatives at the meeting made no effort to hide that the party was being directed by Thaksin Shinawatra. In fact, Chavalit came to the meeting directly from the party's weekly digital video conference with Thaksin. It is likely that the Chavalit joined Puea Thai after coming to an understanding that he would become Prime Minister if the party is able to form a government in the future. Chavalit's move also reflects a lack of viable alternative Puea Thai candidates for Prime Minister after many in the party have been disqualified due to electoral misdeeds. End Summary and Comment.

CHAVALIT AIMS FOR RECONCILIATION

¶3. (C) The Ambassador called October 13 on former Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh at Puea Thai Party headquarters. Chavalit, who announced October 1 that he would join Puea Thai, came to the meeting after conducting a video teleconference with Thaksin Shinawatra. The Ambassador congratulated Chavalit on his return to politics and inquired about his reasons for re-entering politics. Chavalit said he was troubled by the current political divide and wanted to do something positive for the nation.

¶4. (C) Chavalit said that while he currently held no official position in Puea Thai, he had four political goals in the event he was chosen to lead the party. First, Chavalit hoped to bring about reconciliation in the Thai political spectrum and across society. Second, he planned to bring peace to the deep South. Chavalit said he has been well-known as a friend

of southerners for more than thirty years and by drawing on this experience he would be able to bring peace to the troubled region. Third, Chavalit wanted to improve relations with Thailand's neighbors, specifically Cambodia. Calling the Cambodian Prime Minister a good friend, Chavalit said he would visit Phnom Penh October 21 to see Hun Sen. Fourth, Chavalit told the Ambassador that he wanted to bring democracy to Thailand. The former Prime Minister said that Thailand had not achieved real democracy even though absolute monarchy had been abolished in 1932.

15. (C) Chavalit said he had tried to bring about political reconciliation from behind the scenes, but he had not succeeded. As such, he had joined Puea Thai and would try to bring about resolution to the political conflict from an official position, but his future position in Puea Thai would be up to the party members. Nonetheless, Chavalit spoke as if he assumed he would take a leadership role. Chavalit spoke of working to bring about a government for the people and by the people and claimed that that he could accomplish his goals within two years, after which he would wash his hands of politics.

THAKSIN'S RETURN

16. (C) Observing that many seemed opposed to Thaksin's return, the Ambassador asked Chavalit whether he believed there was a way for the former Prime Minister to come back to Thailand. Chavalit said that he had tried to convince those opposed to Thaksin that Thailand needed to have a government

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that reflected the wishes of people. As such it was important for Thaksin to be able to return as he remained popular in many areas of Thailand. Unfortunately, this effort had failed. Nonetheless, Chavalit was confident that Thaksin would return soon and would avoid serving time in prison. The two sides of the political divide needed to come together in order to allow Thailand to move forward.

UNDECIDED ABOUT FUTURE OF THE YELLOW-SHIRTS

17. (C) The Ambassador asked Chavalit for his views of the yellow-shirt People's Alliance for Democracy and its political arm, the New Politics Party. Chavalit initially downplayed the groups' influence but then qualified his statement in claiming that the yellow-shirts influence would depend on whether they would be willing to work for the benefit of the Thai people. As such, Chavalit preferred to take a wait and see approach.

1997 CONSTITUTION A BETTER MODEL

18. (C) The Ambassador asked Chavalit for his thoughts on the chances of amending the Constitution. Chavalit said he believed the 1997 Constitution would be a better basis from which to amend than would be the 2007 charter. Chavalit, who was PM at the time, said that he had initially been opposed to the 1997 draft. King Bhumibol, however, had called Chavalit in for a meeting and told him that the draft would be best for Thailand as the nation had been ready for a strong executive, as was provided for by the 1997 charter. As such, Chavalit had changed his mind and had come to believe that 1997 Constitution, which had been abolished by the 2006 coup d'tat, was a better launching point for bringing Thailand real democracy. The Ambassador noted that it would likely be particularly difficult to convince the ruling Democrat Party to accept the 1997 Constitution due to the charter's association with a dominant executive such as Thaksin. Chavalit responded that the current Constitution had been drafted by a military-appointed body; therefore the principles of the charter were not appropriate for democracy.

JOHN